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Philby and the Milk

Chap. XXII

During our talk I discovered that not content with sitting in Najran, Suwaiyan had from there raided south-east as far as Hadhramaut and Dhufar, and had lifted camels from the dreaded Sai'ar and Karab tribes. He himself had brought back five camels as *chessib*, two of which he showed me outside his tent. They were small brown things, with much less bone than their Hasa brothers. Rather remarkable, I thought, seeing camels raided from Hadhramaut grazing in Kuwait! The same Suwaiyan, I was told, had penetrated into Sana, the capital of Yaman, alone as a spy, and had got back safely.

Whilst we were talking, there entered the tent Ráshid bin Fahad, cousin of Philby's chief guide and leader on the famous march across the Rub' al Kháli. He had many stories to tell of Philby and of the famous milk incident. "What would you," he said, "the she-camel (*nágd*) would not give her milk the evening Hilby* wanted his drink. Camels are like that, you cannot force them to give their milk. *Allah i salmu*, he Hilby, did not understand, and thought the Badawin of the party had drunk his milk."

Philby's friend Falah abu Ja'sha got into serious trouble in August 1935. He was apparently commander of an escort on the Kuwait frontier, which was told off to conduct a Rashidi prisoner from Jeriyah 'Ilya to Hufuf. The prisoner's crime was stealing two Sbei camels from near Riyadh and making off with them to the Kuwait frontier.

When nearing Hufuf, the prisoner cleverly escaped while the escort slept during the heat of the day. Though manacled, he contrived to collect his escort's rifles and ammunition, placed them on one of the camels and got right away to Kuwait and Iraq. He sportingly sent back the rifles and camels to their owners, through a woman living in Kuwait, and by the hand of one Nazzal of the 'Awanna (Rashaida).

As a punishment for his negligence the late Amir 'Abdulla bin Jiluwi, Governor of Hasa, is reported to have ordered that Falah abu Ja'sha's beard, or rather half of it, should be shaved off every Friday for a whole month.

* Mr. Philby is known among the Badawin as 'Abdulla Hilby.

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it works out to about 1/40th of what a man possesses. To the Badawin, 651
ẓakát means the unpleasant annual contribution which his King, or head of the state, has a right to take from him, and is calculated as follows:

(*a*) One *Rial* for every full-grown camel.
(*b*) Half a *Rial* for every young or half-grown camel.
(*c*) One sheep or its value (8 *Rials*) for every forty sheep, whether small or large.

No *ẓakát* is paid on riding camels, or on camels used for carrying 651
Badawin camp equipage from camp to camp. The head of the state 641
has also the right in the event of war to call upon all those who have 687
paid him *ẓakát* to fight for him, failing which he can confiscate all their live stock.

Should a tribe fail to pay *ẓakát* to its lawful Ruler the latter is entitled:

(*a*) To confiscate its property.
(*b*) To refuse to be responsible for its defence or protection from others of his tribes.
(*c*) To refuse to come to its assistance should it be attacked by outside enemies.

Conversely if a tribe pays the *ẓakát* tax due from it, then the Ruler 651
or head of the state is bound to defend that tribe (actively as well as 641
by diplomatic means) from all comers, and whether aggression comes from inside or outside. He is responsible for all the members of the tribe as though they were his own children, or so at least says the desert law.

The head of a state has no right to take *ẓakát* from a foreign tribe which visits his state for grazing purposes and intends only to stay a short time, and will return home and pay *ẓakát* to its rightful Ruler. This is an old and well-established law in Arabia, and is understood by all.

Should the visiting tribe, however, ask for and obtain permission to settle for the summer on wells in the local Ruler's state, then the latter has the right, by unwritten law, to take full *ẓakát* from it. The idea underlying this custom is that the foreign tribe eats up his grazing and drinks his water to the detriment of his own tribe (The great

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Appendix VII

in war or peace, and are at all times guarded with the greatest care and have their own special herdsmen.

The *Shuruf* can best be compared to the famous *Markab* or "Ark of Ishmael" which goes before the Rawala host when the latter tribe migrates to new regions or marches to war, and which is really nothing but a glorified ladies' camel litter, decked all over with black ostrich feathers (see under chapter dealing with the Tent and its treasures), but held in the deepest reverence by every single man and woman of the tribe.

As in the case of the *Markab*, the *Shuruf* is the rallying point of the tribe if attacked or in difficulties. The herd must be defended at all costs, and the tribe will cheerfully lose all its other camels in a battle or raid provided the *Shuruf* are safe.

In the attack, and especially if such be in the nature of a forlorn hope, the *Shuruf* have the place of honour always and lead the van. No Mutairi ever rides them, and they just move forward in a compact well-trained black mass ahead of the fighting men as if perfectly understanding the game. The latter will follow straight on to victory or death in their wake. The *Shuruf* seem also to know that they afford a sort of moving wall of protection for the footmen in their rear, and never scatter.

In peace time the famous black herd always grazes alone and under specially selected guards, always too as far from the common gaze as possible. It is said that should other strange camels get mixed up with them, the black herd will attack them and drive them out. Nor are the cows of the herd allowed to breed except from their own males.

To-day the *Al Shuruf* are in the hands of the great 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud —King and Lord of Arabia. They were taken away from the Mutair as the most severe punishment that could be meted out to them after Faisal al Duwish's rebellion of 1929–30, and are to-day (1939) most carefully guarded and looked after for the King by the faithful Shaikh Faisal bin Shiblan, head of the Jiblan sept of the great Mutair. Actually the King handed the *Shuruf* over to his brother Muhammad al Sa'ud for safe keeping after the above-mentioned rebellion, but this was a mere formality, for H.M. King 'Abdul 'Aziz' brand adorns the rear off hind quarter of each camel like this, ₀|₀, and the herd remains the King's property, much as in the occident any war flags captured from an enemy are handed over to the King.

As far as I am aware, my wife and I are the only Europeans living who have had the opportunity of setting eyes on this jealously guarded herd and semi-sacred tribal emblem of the Mutair. This was on 7th April and 14th April, 1939, when, by special invitation of His Highness the Shaikh of Kuwait, King Bin Sa'ud sent his private camels numbering seventy-five *Raiyah* or herds, together with the *Shuruf* (some 4,500 all told) into the Araifjan and Shu'aiba districts of Kuwait to graze, the act being a gracious appreciation on the part of Shaikh Ahmad for Bin Sa'ud's good will and